United States of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 107th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

WASHINGTON, WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2002

Senate

FARM POLICY

Mr. CARPER. Madam President, earlier this afternoon, an hour or so ago on this floor, we adopted a new farm policy for our country. In Delaware, in Michigan, even in Connecticut and Kansas, farmers are struggling to try to make a go of it.

Some of the woes that our agricultural communities face are laid at the foot of the agricultural policy which was adopted by the Congress, I believe, in 1996. I would just observe that some of the problems our farmers face may be fairly attributable to that national farm policy. But not all of the woes of agricultural communities can be traced back to the legislation adopted some 6 years ago.

In my own view, the bigger problem is overproduction. In my own view, the bigger problem is we have too much commodity and not enough demand for that commodity, whether the commodity is corn or soybeans, the commodity is milk or rice or cotton or beef--even chicken. We have too much commodity and not enough demand, too much commodity produced in this country and around the world.

The bill we have just passed provides subsidies to support those who are raising major crops, including corn, soybeans, rice, and cotton. Those supports—loan prices--are important. But the answer to what ails our farms and our agricultural communities is not merely more subsidies or greater subsidies. The answer, I believe, ultimately is better alignment of supply and demand.

Let me mention a few ways we can do that. One is through biomass. At a time when our country is importing about 60 percent of the oil we use, we also live in an age where you can take soybean oil and mix it with diesel fuel and provide a perfectly good fuel for diesel vehicles. We can do a similar thing with corn for ethanol vehicles.

We are learning how to transform plants into factories. We can now raise plants that will create an enzyme that is otherwise created in a chemical factory. The plants literally enable you to produce the same enzyme 40 percent cheaper than might be produced with a chemical factory, with fewer negative environmental consequences.

We learned how to infect or inject a virus into a product or crop such as soybeans or even tobacco, and the plant then creates a vaccine which can be used, among other things, to fight cancer.

The folks at DuPont have recently perfected a soybean seed that grows a soybean that produces soy milk that is almost impossible to distinguish from regular milk with respect to its taste.

Those are just some of the things we can do to create more demand, untraditional demand for the enormous amount of commodities, farm

commodities we are producing in this country and in other places.

I add to those, we found out in Delaware, as we clean out our chicken houses, we can take some of the chicken litter and, instead of spreading it on our farm fields, we can burn it and derive a Btu value for electricity, and do so in an environmentally clean way. We can take the chicken litter out of chicken houses and treat it under high temperature and make a high nitrogen/high phosphorus fertilizer and ship it across the country and across the world and provide a source of cash revenue for farmers from what was previously a waste product of which we had too much.

One of the aspects I especially like about the bill we passed is it supplements and supports the efforts of States such as Delaware and perhaps others here to preserve agricultural land through conservation. In my State, we have invested tens of millions of dollars, State dollars in recent years, to purchase agricultural development rights, providing money for farmers for farm equipment, irrigation systems, and other ways to support their farming operation by agreeing to put their farms in perpetuity in farmland. It is going to continue to be a farm forever. This legislation we passed here today provides Federal support for what many of us have done at the State level.

The last thing is companies such as DuPont and Syngenta and others in our country have developed ways to create seeds and to grow plants that are more drought resistant than otherwise would be, plants and seeds that are resistant to a particular kind of inspect, plants that need fewer fertilizers, less fertilizer, less insecticides, less pesticides. We have the ability, through that kind of research and the application of that research, to build a better mousetrap--if not a better mousetrap, a better soybean plant, and to enable us to have a leg up on the competition in other parts of the world. Those are some of the things, some of the factors that will enable us to help revive our agricultural industry in this country.

There are a lot of good things in that farm bill that we passed. Part of the solution, part of the way out of the duress in which farmers find themselves, is in that legislation. But a good deal is not. I wanted to share some of my thoughts today, and I thank the Chair for indulging me.